

98-67 and CC Docket NO. 90-571

Ms. Magalie Salas
Office of the Secretary of the FCC
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

ORIGINAL

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Subject: "EX PARTE COMMENT FOR DOCKET NUMBER 90-571 on NECA FUNDS" and "EX PARTE COMMENT TO DOCKET NUMBER 98-67 ON TRS/STS OUTREACH"

Dear Ms Salas:

REQUEST

I live in Massachusetts and I urge Vista, Horizon and the State of Massachusetts to work together to make telephones more accessible to more people with speech disabilities by establishing an effective Speech to Speech outreach service. I also ask that any technical problems in providing the service be resolved.

SUCSESSES

In California, people with speech disabilities have dramatically improved their lives because of STS. One example is Dr. Robert Aber who experienced great growth in his psychology practice once he was able to communicate with clients over STS. Writer Pam Hoyer advanced her writing career substantially using STS to gather facts for articles. Dr Bob Segalman became successful as a social activist helping people with speech disabilities once he began using STS. STS potentially answers the telecommunications needs of thousands of people.

PROVIDING STS OUTREACH

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In addition to providing STS itself, providing outreach appropriate to people with speech disabilities is an essential part of access. When people with speech disabilities have appropriate training to use STS, they become more independent, participate more in the community, get jobs etc. The new relay regulations require states and relay providers to contract such that relay is accessible to users with speech disabilities.

If STS is provided without appropriate outreach, call volumes will be extremely low. Call volumes could rise substantially with an extensive STS outreach service tailored to people with speech disabilities. Failure to provide appropriate outreach for STS means that many Massachusetts residents with speech disabilities will not enter the mainstream of life.

Because I want this independence for people with speech disabilities in Massachusetts, I strongly urge the provision of an appropriate STS outreach service. Such a service should be similar to the very successful intensive outreach services provided in Minnesota, and to a lesser extent in California and Maryland.

FUNDING STS OUTREACH

Based on Minnesota's budgetary experience, such a service may cost \$150,000 annually given Massachusetts's population.. Many states have sufficient surcharge money to fund a STS outreach service without difficulty. Vocational rehabilitation client services money may be available to teach people to use STS as it fosters independence and makes people job ready.

CONCLUSION

A large proportion of people with speech disabilities have other disabilities as well; this makes it very difficult for them to advocate for themselves. Therefore, it is necessary for the rest of us to

insure that services like STS outreach are adequately provided for.

Again, I strongly urge that a budget be established in Massachusetts for an effective STS outreach service with an annual budget of \$150,000. I also urge the resolution of any remaining technical problems in the provision of the service.

Sincerely,

Emik A. Avakian

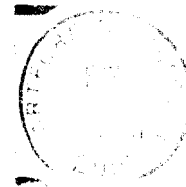
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Attn: Mrs Salas

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